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S E C R E T SEOUL 2051

NODIS CHEROKEE

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, KS

SUBJECT: ARREST OF KOREAN POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS FIGURES

REF: STATE 063685

SUMMARY: I MET MARCH 18 WITH PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARY GENERAL KIM CHONG-YOM TO EXPRESS USG CONCERNS ON ROKG HANDLING OF KIM TAE-JUNG AND OTHERS INVOLVED IN MARCH 1 STATEMENT, AS INSTRUCTED REFTEL. SYG KIM WAS FULLY PREPARED FOR APPROACH AND GAVE NO GROUND ON ROKG INTENTION TO TRY KIM TAE-JUNG AND OTHERS, EVEN THOUGH ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES IN US RECOGNIZED. RATIONALE ADVANCED WAS THAT NATIONAL SECURITY, AS INTERPRETED BY ROKG, MORE VITAL. SYG KIM PROMISED TO PRESENT USG APPROACH FULLY TO ATTENTION PRESIDENT PARK. END SUMMARY.

1. WHEN I MET WITH SYG KIM, HE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY PRESIDENTIAL PROTOCOL SECRETARY CHOI KWANG-SU, WHO SERVED AS INTERPRETER. SYG KIM WAS FULLY PREPARED FOR MY APPROACH WITH FIVE PAGE SHEAF OF NOTES, ALTHOUGH WE HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY INDICATED REASON FOR REQUEST OF APPOINTMENT EXCEPT TO MENTION MESSAGE FROM WASHINGTON.

2. IN MAKING APPROACH TO SYG KIM, I TALKED ON BASIS POINTS IN REFTEL, STRESSING POTENTIAL ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES FROM TRIAL OF KIM AND SETTING FORTH OUR VIEW ROKG SHOULD NOT TRY KIM TAE-JUNG AND OTHERS AND SHOULD EFFECT THEIR RELEASE

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IN ITS OWN SELF INTEREST. I POINTED OUT AT SEVERAL TIMES

THAT WE WERE SPEAKING AS AN ALLY ON MUTUAL PROBLEM
THAT AFFECTED BOTH OF US.

3. SYG KIM RESPONDED THAT ROKG UNDERSTOOD US INTEREST
AND CONCERN IN HANDLING OF THIS INCIDENT AND ACCEPTED
THAT IT WAS MUTUAL PROBLEM. HE THEN LAUNCHED INTO FULL
RATIONALE FOR ROKG ACTIONS ALONG LARGELY FAMILIAR TERMS.

4. THE KEY POINTS MADE BY SYG KIM IN HIS INITIAL
PRESENTATION OF RATIONALE WERE:

(A) THOSE INVOLVED IN MARCH 1 INCIDENT HAD SYSTEMATICALLY
PLANNED TO OVERTHROW THE PARK GOVERNMENT WITH INTENTION
TO AGITATE AND AROUSE POPULAR REVOLT, LED PARTICULARLY
BY STUDENTS, RELIGIOUS FIGURES, WORKING PEOPLE AND OTHERS.

(B) THE MARCH 1 GROUP HAD TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF RELIGIOUS
SERVICE TO TRY TO INSTIGATE THESE GROUPS, CALLING FOR
THE END OF EM-9 MEASURES, REVISION OF CONSTITUTION, AND
STEPPING DOWN OF GOVERNMENT.

(C) AFTER FALL OF INDOCHINA KOREAN PEOPLE AS A WHOLE WERE
RESOLVED ONLY WAY FOR NATION TO SURVIVE WAS THROUGH
DOMESTIC STABILITY, NATIONAL CONSENSUS, AND UNITY OF
PEOPLE. VAST MAJORITY SUPPORTED THIS POSITION.

(D) IF UNITY OF PUBLIC IS DISTURBED BY SUCH ACTIVITIES,
THEN ENSUING CONFUSION CAN ESCALATE PROVIDING NORTH
KOREA WITH OPPORTUNITY TO INVADE, THUSEENDANGERING NATION
AND PEOPLE.

(E) ROKG IS WELL AWARE OF U.S. ELECTIONS THIS YEAR AND
POTENTIAL FOR POLITICAL DEBATE ON MANY ISSUES; IT IS TRYING
TO MINIMIZE ADVERSE EFFECTS ON ELECTION CAMPAIGN OF KOREAN ISSUE.

(F) FOR THIS REASON ROKG, WHILE AWARE ILLEGAL ACTIONS
WERE BEING UNDERTAKEN, TRIED TO PERSUADE AND WARN THOSE
RESPONSIBLE TO EXERCISE SELF-RESTRAINT TO AVOID KOREA
BECOMING INVOLVED IN US POLITICAL DEBATE. BUT KOREAN
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO DATE WERE TO NO AVAIL AND THOSE
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INVOLVED IN MARCH 1 INCIDENT PERSISTED IN ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES.

(G) ROKG HAS NO CHOICE THEREFORE BUT TO ACT IN ACCORDANCE
WITH ITS LAWS. IF LEGAL MEASURES NOT TAKEN, DESPITE
STRENGTH OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT, AGITATION WOULD SPREAD
AS IT HAD IN THE PAST TO STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN SPRING,
AGITATION BY CHURCHES, ETC., WHICH WOULD THEN DEVELOP
INTO BROAD PUBLIC CONFUSION AND FURTHER POLITICAL DEBATE

IN US. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES NORTH KOREA WOULD NOT
FAIL TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SITUATION IN BOTH ROK AND US
AND LAUNCH ARMED ATTACK.

5. IN SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSION I REITERATED ADVERSE
CONSEQUENCES FORESEEN IN US AND POINTED OUT THESE TOO
COULD WELL ENDANGER ROKG STABILITY AND SECURITY. I
PROBED FURTHER FOR BASIS OF GOVERNMENT STRONG ACTION,
POINTING OUT ACKNOWLEDGED STRENGTH OF ROKG PUBLIC SUPPORT.
SYG KIM RESPONDED THAT ROKG WELL AWARE HANDLING OF
MARCH 1 INCIDENT COULD HAVE UNFAVORABLE EFFECT ON US PUBLIC
OPINION AND IN TURN ADVERSE EFFECT ON ROKG. BUT, IF SUCH
INSTANCES OF "ILLEGAL" OPPOSITION LEFT UNPUNISHED THIS WOULD
INVOLVE FAR GREATER DANGER TO KOREAN SECURITY AND SURVIVAL.
SYG KIM REITERATED THIS BASIC THEME AT SEVERAL POINTS,

WHILE RECOGNIZING DIFFICULTIES FACED BY USG AS RESULT ROKG
ACTIONS. AT ONE POINT, SYG KIM EXPRESSED "PERSONAL VIEW" THAT
KOREAN GOVERNMENT PREPARED TO ACCEPT CUT IN MILITARY ASSISTANCE
AND LOSS OF SOME US BANK CREDIT AS PRICE OF MAINTAINING
DOMESTIC STABILITY. USG EFFORTS TO HELP ROK IN
VARIOUS FIELDS WERE GREATLY APPRECIATED, AND KOREAN
GOVERNMENT HOPED USG WOULD UNDERSTAND ITS PROBLEMS.

6. DURING CONVERSATION SYG KIM MADE SEVERAL OTHER
SUPPLEMENTAL POINTS:

(A) KOREAN SITUATION IS UNIQUE DUE TO THREAT FROM THE NORTH;

(B) NORTH KOREA OBJECTIVE IS SITUATION OF CONFUSION
IN ROK DURING PERIOD OF US ELECTIONS WHEN US LESS LIKELY TO
RESPOND;

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(C) KIM TAE-JUNG AND OTHERS WILL RECEIVE FAIR AND OPEN
TRIAL WITH DETAILS TO BE PROVIDED US LATER;
AND

(D) ROKG HAS SOUGHT TO GIVE THOSE INVOLVED HUMANE
TREATMENT WITH WOMEN AND THOSE OVER SEVENTY NOT
PLACED IN CUSTODY AND THOSE NOT ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN
CONSPIRACY NOT TRIED.

7. AT ONE POINT SYG KIM TRIED TO TAKE OFFENSIVE BY
ASKING US TO LOOK INTO POSSIBLE CONSPIRACY BETWEEN
ANTI-GOVERNMENT ELEMENTS IN US AND JAPAN, PARTICULARLY
KOREANS, BUT ALSO SOME AMERICANS, WHO ARE WORKING
WITH ANTI-GOVERNMENT ELEMENTS IN KOREA TO OVERTHROW
THE PARK GOVERNMENT. I RESPONDED QUICKLY THAT, WHILE

WE WOULD LOOK AT ANY EVIDENCE PROVIDED US, IT WAS OUR IMPRESSION THAT US SUPPORTERS OF OPPOSITION WERE ACTING OUT OF A DEEP SENSE OF CONVICTION IN SUPPORT OF DEMOCRACY, AND IT WAS NOT PROPER TO DEPRECATE THEIR MOTIVES. SYG KIM DROPPED THIS ONE QUICKLY.

8. AT VARIOUS POINTS DURING CONVERSATION I PROBED FOR ANY GIVE IN ROKG POSITION AND REITERATED US CONCERNS ABOUT ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES OF KIM TRIAL. SYG KIM AT CONCLUSION SAID THAT HE WOULD OF COURSE PASS FULL REPORT PROMPTLY TO PRESIDENT PARK ABOUT OUR APPROACH, BUT LEFT ABSOLUTELY NO INDICATION OF ANY INTENTION TO RECONSIDER DECISION TO TRY KIM TAE-CHUNG AND OTHERS.

COMMENT: IT WAS EVIDENT THAT SYG KIM WAS FULLY PREPARED FOR OUR APPROACH TO POINT OF ACCEPTING BASIC US CONCERNS, BUT THEN GIVING FAR HIGHER PRIORITY TO ROKG VIEW AS TO REQUIREMENTS FOR ITS "NATIONAL SURVIVAL". ALTHOUGH SYG KIM PROMISED TO REPORT TO PRESIDENT PARK, THERE WAS ALSO EVERY INDICATION THAT POSITION SET FORTH HAD BEEN FULLY DISCUSSED AND CLEARED BY PARK.

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